

Commentary

Editor's Note:

Each year, Swedish Medical Center Foundation receives hundreds of gifts from employees, physicians and volunteers during the Swedish Fund Drive. While staff can contribute to any area of their choosing, each year a special fund or project is selected as the focus.

In 2009, the Foundation selected the Employee Emergency Fund. Through this fund, Swedish employees have received help to

pay rent when they haven't been able to work due to illness, find emergency housing after a fire and pay for emergency car repairs. For over 20 years, it has been a tradition of employees helping each other.

This year we are pleased to share a personal story from one of our nurse practitioners. – RM

Dear friends and colleagues,

Last fall, the Swedish Foundation held its annual Swedish Fund Drive, which featured the Employee Emergency Fund as its target for last year's donations. This motivated me to share my story and offer my gratitude as an employee and past beneficiary of this fund.

Due to extenuating circumstances in my youth, I became independent and employed full time at St. Peter's Hospital in Helena, Montana, by the age of 15. I went to school by day, and reported to my job each evening as an admitting clerk and hospital operator. I completed my high school career and attended Carroll College in Helena for a year, but over the course of time I began feeling that there were broader opportunities for me in Seattle. On completing my first year of college, I packed my 1979 Honda Civic with just about everything I owned and moved to Seattle.

I landed an admitting clerk job at Ballard Community Hospital the first day I arrived and found a nearby hotel to live in on Aurora Avenue that busy Friday afternoon. I had \$400 cash and a bright outlook that, no matter what the circumstances, "if there's a will, there's a way!"

I quickly realized the expense of the city and what it was going to take to get my feet on the ground and return back to school. I set out to find a second job, and to my good fortune, that job came in the form of a unit secretary position on the bone marrow transplant unit at Swedish Medical Center. This job was the beginning of many great things in my life, including the realization that my professional calling was to pursue an education and career in nursing.

Soon after my employment began at Swedish, I fell ill with a severe case of mononucleosis. Although I had health benefits, I didn't have much else to fall back on — I was new in town with minimal social support and financial stability, and a vicious sense of pride that got in the way of asking a stranger for help. My illness created disabling fatigue, a compromised liver, and a six-week leave from work without income. And since my car had failed on me shortly after I arrived, it was all I could do to take public transportation for biweekly doctor's visits.

Two weeks into this leave, I received an unexpected call from my nurse manager. She very kindly and gently requested the name of my landlord and advised that certificates for Safeway were on the way in the mail. She had identified my essential needs, and I was overwhelmed by this random act of kindness. She had gone to the Swedish Foundation to gain funds for a month of rent and certificates to buy food through the Employee Emergency Fund. Although I was grateful for this support, I was more deeply concerned about how I would pay this back, even with my two jobs. I later came to learn there was no debt to be paid.

That was 22 years ago, and it was only the beginning of my opportunity to be both on the receiving and giving end of kindness and generosity. This experience imbedded a sense of responsibility and desire to give back when and however I can. I know this is only one minor example of how the Swedish Foundation and the Employee Emergency Fund work in someone's life in an unexpected time of need. I know the Foundation is an integral resource to our community, not only within the walls of Swedish, but in its offerings on a bigger scale. And I know that resource wouldn't be possible without the generosity of others. Thank you to all employees who support Swedish. I have personally seen the benefit of giving, and know what an impact it can make on a life. There are so many ways to give to our community — through our professions, financial donations and volunteering time — but I believe that no matter how big or small the contribution, generosity magically inspires giving, and giving travels full circle.

In thanks and gratitude,



Joelle Thirsk Fathi

Swedish Medical Center Campaign Update

Campaign Update is published quarterly for the employees of Swedish Medical Center by the Swedish Medical Center Foundation. We welcome your comments and suggestions. Please contact Randy Mann, Senior Director Campaign, at 206-386-6791.



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